

# If the Glove Fits . . . and Is

By Ltjg. Ryan Halverson,  
USS Juneau (LPD 10)

One of the harder tasks aboard an amphibious ship is keeping Marines safe under working and living conditions to which they aren't accustomed. I learned this the hard way as USS *Juneau's* food service officer.

I well know the dangers inherent to any ship's galley, and, in retrospect, *Juneau* had done well in preventing mishaps in her galley spaces. During nine months of operations, our most serious mishap had been a scratch—thanks to outstanding galley leadership. The leaders had anticipated potential hazards and had taken steps to avoid mishaps.

Then came the Marines: We embarked more than 400 for a two-month exercise, and with them came their requirement to provide Marine cooks and food service attendants. The galley wouldn't have been able to function without them, since the embarked Marines had more than doubled our crew size. Anyone who has served aboard an amphibious ship understands the Marines don't have a lot of time to adapt to shipboard life. They march on board, are briefed about where the chow-line and heads are located, and go on their way. They are fed soon after boarding, so ship's company must train the Marine cooks and mess men "on the run." Throw in some 10-foot seas and 16-hour days, and you have the ingredients for a mishap.

Three weeks into this exercise, things were running quite smoothly, then it seemed like everything hit at once. Within a five-day period, I suddenly had three Marines burned by hot water. Had they followed a few precautions and worn protective equipment, their burns would have been avoided.

The first incident took place when we had to improvise to wash pots and pans; our deep-sink booster-heater was out of commission. We were using a steam-jacketed kettle to sanitize larger

galley utensils. Though this method is not recommended, we had to use available equipment to wash those pots and pans. A corporal's lapse in judgment most likely caused this mishap, because PPE would have prevented his burns. He simply reached into the kettle deeper than his gloves protected him, and hot water seeped inside the gloves, burning him.

A second similar accident could have been avoided the same way: wearing proper gloves. Another Marine mess man was retrieving a pot





# Required . . . **Wear It!**

from the kettle when he slipped because of rough seas. His gloves were only elbow-length, so scalding water seeped into them and burned his forearm.

The third burn mishap involved a Marine carrying hot water in a plastic bucket from the kettle to the front serving line. The hot water had softened the bucket; while the Marine was carrying the water, he slipped and instinctively squeezed the bucket to keep it from slipping out of his grasp. That squeeze forced water out of the bucket onto his unprotected arms, burning him.



Had these three Marines each worn shoulder-length gloves, no one would have been burned. While your arms and hands might get hot when you wear these somewhat cumbersome gloves, not doing so can be painful, as the three *Juneau* galley Marines learned. Supervisors should have directed the three to wear long gloves while they were working around the steam kettles. Perhaps those supervisors had become too comfortable with the fact a galley mishap hadn't occurred in such a long time. Perhaps they also didn't consider the food service workers weren't working in the deep sink. Nonetheless, there are no valid reasons for inadequate supervision.

What did I, as the food service officer, learn from these mishaps? I learned that, after a long spell of no mishaps, it periodically is necessary to refresh everyone about safety. Training is essential, especially when inexperienced workers are performing hazardous tasks. The time to train them is before they tackle their assignments. By instilling in your people knowledge of safe work habits and situational awareness, you minimize risk and avoid mishaps.

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Finally, always follow procedures to the letter. When a task is performed repeatedly, it becomes routine, and you tend to lower your guard and situational awareness. Don't! Mishaps occur when you least expect them, so always be vigilant of your surroundings and how you're performing the task at hand.

If you aren't, you just might get "burned." ☼